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SUBJECT: ANKARA MEDIA REACTION REPORT
FRIDAY, MARCH 17, 2006

In Today's Papers

Foreign Minister Gul to Meet with Rice, Hadley in the US
Sabah, Turkiye, Referans, Yeni Safak: Foreign Minister Abdullah Gul, State Minister Kursad Tuzmen, Energy Minister Hilmi Guler, Tourism Minister Atilla Koc, and Farming Minister Mehdi Eker will travel to the United States to participate in the 25th annual conference of the Turkish American Business Council (TABC), American Turkish Council (ATC) and American Friends of Turkey (AFOT) to be held on March 26-29. Gul will discuss Iran, the Hamas visit to Turkey, and Turkish concerns regarding Kirkuk and Iraq with US officials. Sabah expects Secretary Rice to ask Gul for Turkish support to isolate Tehran, whereas Yeni Safak, basing its report on US sources, says Iran will not be raised during the Rice-Gul meeting. During talks with the Americans, Gul will express Turkey's readiness to support UN sanctions against Iran. Rice will tell the Turks that the Hamas visit to Turkey had caused a "confidence crisis" in ties with Turkey. Sabah claims Ankara is concerned anger over the Hamas visit to Turkey may cause the Jewish lobby to cease supporting Turkey in the face of Armenian "genocide" claims in the United States. Gul will also meet with NSA Director Stephen Hadley and some Jewish lobbying groups in Washington. Gul will be accompanied by a large delegation of Turkish businessmen who will push Americans to increase trade between the two countries to USD 70 billion from the existing USD 10 billion.

Stability and Consensus Needed in Iraq

Yeni Safak: Speaking to NTV, Turkey's special envoy to Iraq, Ambassador Oguz Celikkol said that Iraq had "never come so close to a civil war." Celikkol noted that Iraq was being dragged towards a civil war which could be

prevented by the political process in the country. Celikkol stated that Turkey was in favor of the formation of a government consisting of the representatives of all groups in Iraq as soon as possible. If the new government could take concrete steps against the PKK, this would have a positive effect on relations between the two countries. Celikkol added that meetings with various groups in Iraq were continuing and the Turkish Consulate General in Mosul would be opened after finding a suitable location.

Columnist Murat Yetkin emphasizes that a secure and stable Iraq is in everybody's interest. In his analysis in the liberal-intellectual Radikal he wrote: "Given the current situation, a national unity government for Iraq seems like a distant dream. The Turkish special envoy for Iraq characterizes the current situation as being close to a civil war. The surprising development that the US and Iran will talk about Iraq is important at this point. Iran's suggestions might be helpful in clearing up the confusion in Iraq. There is actually a common point which brings the US, Turkey as well as Iran together: the urgent need for peace in Iraq."

Danistay Rejects Annulment of Use of Turkish Bases by Allies

All papers: The Danistay (Turkish High Court) rejected a request by the Istanbul Bar Association to annul a council of ministers bill that permits Turkey's allies to use Turkish bases for one-year period. The council of ministers had decided in June 23, 2003 to allow the US to use Turkish bases, ports and airports for operations with

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regard to Iraq, and had extended it in 2004 and 2005. The Danistay said the council of ministers decision was in line with UN Security Council resolutions, and rejected the appeal for annulment, in a move regarded by the papers as "a visa to the US for Turkish bases."

EU Education Ministers Conference in Austria
Milliyet, Aksam, Cumhuriyet: The EU Education Ministers' unofficial meeting started in Austria yesterday. During the two-day meetings Turkish Education Minister Huseyin Celik will respond to the EU's demand for Turkey to re-open the Halki seminary and to start Kurdish language education. The EU has signaled that it would discuss issues related to political criteria, such as Kurdish courses and the opening of Halki seminary under the technical 'education and culture' section. The Turkish Foreign Ministry, in return, instructed its Ambassadors in EU countries to prevent this decision which would mean an act of double standard towards Turkey and would cause a further drop in Turkish public support for the EU process. Turkish diplomats stressed that accession talks on education and culture with the past 10 candidate countries did not include political conditions and Turkey should not be an exception.

RTUK Poll on TV Viewership in Turkey

A survey conducted by television and radio watchdog RTUK on TV viewership in Turkey showed that 56.7 percent trusted TV news while 34 percent did not. 56.5 percent said newspapers are reliable while 29.9 percent disagreed. In terms of most viewed programs, newscasts lead by 74.8 percent, followed by Turkish soap operas (56.8), music and talk shows (42.2), documentaries (40.8), movies (40.8), religious programs (40.5), and roundtable discussions (40.4). The survey was conducted in 14 cities with 4,606 people over 15 in December and January.

Assistant Secretary Fried Visits Ankara

Milliyet, Radikal, Yeni Safak: US Assistant Secretary of State for European and Eurasian Affairs Dan Fried said, after meetings at Turkish Foreign Ministry (MFA)

yesterday, that the United States expected progress in Turkey-Armenia relations. Fried told the Turks to open the border with Armenia. The Turkish side said that they supported peace initiatives by the US, but that there must first be progress on the Nagorno-Karabakh issue. Ambassador Steve Mann accompanied Fried at meetings in Ankara.

TV Highlights NTV (7 a.m.)

Domestic News

- 23 NGOs issued a call for common sense on the eve of Nevruz celebrations in Turkey.
- Five military officers died in a military helicopter crash after hitting high-voltage lines in the eastern province of Erzincan.
- Turkish and Armenian historians have agreed to work on a joint project for the investigation of Armenian genocide claims in the second day of the Armenian conference held by Istanbul University.
- President Sezer approved a bill for the founding of 15 new universities in Turkey, but will apply to the Danistay (Turkish High Court) for the annulment of a

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provision of the law authorizing the education minister and the prime minister to nominate university rectors.

International News

- 1500 US and Iraqi troops launched an air and ground military assault against the insurgents in Samarra. The operation was the largest in Iraq since the 2003 invasion.
- 275 Iraqi lawmakers took oath at the first meeting of the parliament since it was elected in December.
- The updated US national security strategy says Iran and its nuclear program are the biggest future challenges to the US.
- The Israeli acting Prime Minister Ehud Olmert's Kadima party, the frontrunner in the forthcoming March 28 elections, increased its votes after the raid on the Palestinian prison in Jericho, a public opinion survey said on Thursday.

Economy News

- In its third review in Turkey, IMF officials will ask for new measures to compensate the losses after the VAT discount granted to the textile sector.
- Turkey is preparing to introduce a "chip and PIN" credit card system by the end of this month.
- Visit Ankara's Classified Web Site at

<http://www.state.sgov.gov/p/eur/ankara/>

WILSON